

Claims

What we claim is:

1. A purified nucleic acid segment comprising a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronate synthase.
2. The purified nucleic acid segment of claim 1, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronate synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.
3. The purified nucleic acid segment of claim 1, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.
4. A purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronate synthase, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment is capable of hybridizing to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.
5. A purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronate synthase, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment has semiconservative or conservative amino codon acid changes when compared to the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.
6. A recombinant vector selected from the group consisting of a plasmid, cosmid, phage, or virus vector and wherein the

recombinant vector further comprises a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase.

7. The recombinant vector of claim 5, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

8. The recombinant vector of claim 6, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

9. The recombinant vector of claim 6, wherein the plasmid further comprises an expression vector.

10. The recombinant vector of claim 9, wherein the expression vector comprises a promoter operatively linked to the enzymatically active *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase coding region.

11. A recombinant host cell, wherein the recombinant host cell is a prokaryotic cell transformed with a recombinant vector comprising a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase.

12. The recombinant host cell of claim 11, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

13. The recombinant host cell of claim 11, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

14. The recombinant host cell of claim 13, wherein the host cell produces hyaluronic acid.

15. The recombinant host cell of claim 11, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified structure.

16. The recombinant host cell of claim 11, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified size distribution.

17. A recombinant host cell, wherein the recombinant host cell is a eukaryotic cell transfected with a recombinant vector comprising a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase.

18. The recombinant host cell of claim 17, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

19. The recombinant host cell of claim 17, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

20. The recombinant host cell of claim 19, wherein the host cell produces hyaluronic acid.

21. The recombinant host cell of claim 17, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified structure.

22. The recombinant host cell of claim 17, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified size distribution.

23. A recombinant host cell, wherein the recombinant host cell is electroporated to introduce a recombinant vector into the recombinant host cell, wherein the recombinant vector comprises a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase.

24. The recombinant host cell of claim 23, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

25. The recombinant host cell of claim 23, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

26. The recombinant host cell of claim 25, wherein the host cell produces hyaluronic acid.

27. The recombinant host cell of claim 23, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified structure.

28. The recombinant host cell of claim 23, wherein the enzymatically active *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified size distribution.

29. A recombinant host cell, wherein the recombinant host cell is transduced with a recombinant vector comprising a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase.

30. The recombinant host cell of claim 29, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment encodes the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

31. The recombinant host cell of claim 29, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment comprises a nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

32. The recombinant host cell of claim 31, wherein the host cell produces hyaluronic acid.

33. The recombinant host cell of claim 29, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified structure.

34. The recombinant host cell of claim 29, wherein the enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase is capable of producing a hyaluronic acid polymer having a modified size distribution.

35. A purified composition, wherein the purified composition comprises an enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase polypeptide.

36. A purified composition, wherein the purified composition comprises a polypeptide having an amino acid sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:2.

37. A method for detecting a DNA species, comprising the steps of:

obtaining a DNA sample;

contacting the DNA sample with a purified nucleic acid segment

in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1;

hybridizing the DNA sample and the purified nucleic acid

segment thereby forming a hybridized complex; and

detecting the complex.

38. A method for detecting a bacterial cell that expresses mRNA encoding *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase, comprising the steps of:

obtaining a bacterial cell sample;

contacting at least one nucleic acid from the bacterial cell

sample with purified nucleic acid segment in accordance

with SEQ ID NO:1;

hybridizing the at least one nucleic acid and the purified

nucleic acid segment thereby forming a hybridized complex;

and

detecting the hybridized complex, wherein the presence of the

hybridized complex is indicative of a bacterial strain

that expresses mRNA encoding *Streptococcus equisimilis*

hyaluronan synthase.

39. A method for producing hyaluronic acid, comprising the steps of:

introducing a purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase into a host organism, wherein the host organism contains nucleic acid segments encoding enzymes which produce UDP-GlcNAc and UDP-GlcA;

growing the host organism in a medium to secrete hyaluronic acid; and

recovering the secreted hyaluronic acid.

40. The method according to claim 39, wherein the step of recovering the hyaluronic acid comprises extracting the secreted hyaluronic acid from the medium.

41. The method according to claim 40, further comprising the step of purifying the extracted hyaluronic acid.

42. The method according to claim 39, wherein in the step of growing the host organism, the host organism secretes a structurally modified hyaluronic acid.

43. The method according to claim 39, wherein in the step of growing the host organism, the host organism secretes a hyaluronic acid having a modified size.

44. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a preselected pharmaceutical drug and an effective amount of hyaluronic acid produced by hyaluronan synthase.

45. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 44, wherein the hyaluronic acid is produced by the *Streptococcus equisimilis* hyaluronan synthase of SEQ ID NO:2.

46. The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 44, wherein the molecular weight of the hyaluronic acid is modified thereby producing a modified molecular weight pharmaceutical composition capable of evading an immune response.

47. The pharmaceutical composition according to claim 44, wherein the molecular weight of the hyaluronic acid is modified thereby producing a modified molecular weight pharmaceutical composition capable of targeting a specific tissue or cell type within the patient having an affinity for the modified molecular weight pharmaceutical composition.

48. A purified and isolated nucleic acid sequence encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase, the nucleic acid sequence selected from the group consisting of:

- (a) the nucleic acid sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1;
- (b) complementary nucleic acid sequences to the nucleic acid sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1;

53. A procaryotic or eucaryotic host cell transformed or transfected with a nucleic acid segment according to claim 51 in a manner allowing the host cell to express hyaluronic acid.

54. A purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronan synthase, wherein the purified nucleic acid segment is capable of hybridizing to the nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID NO:1.

55. A purified nucleic acid segment according to SEQ ID NO:3 capable of hybridizing to SEQ ID NO:1.

56. A purified nucleic acid segment according to SEQ ID NO:4 capable of hybridizing to SEQ ID NO:1.

57. A purified nucleic acid segment according to SEQ ID NO:5 capable of hybridizing to SEQ ID NO:1.

58. A purified nucleic acid segment according to SEQ ID NO:6 capable of hybridizing to SEQ ID NO:1.

59. A purified nucleic acid segment having a coding region encoding enzymatically active hyaluronate synthase, the purified nucleic acid segment selected from the group consisting of:

(A) the nucleic acid segment according to SEQ ID NO: 2;

5 (B) the nucleotide sequence in accordance with SEQ ID
NO: 1;

(C) nucleic acid segments which hybridize to the nucleic
acid segments defined in (A) or (B) or fragments
thereof; and

10 (D) nucleic acid segments which but for the degeneracy
of the genetic code, or encoding of functionally
equivalent amino acids, would hybridize to the
nucleic acid segments defined in (A), (B), and (C).

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